

Tennessee Secretary of State

Civics Lesson Plans

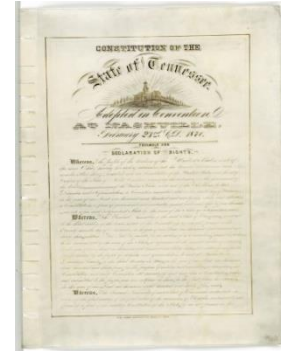
My Local Government (Extension)

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Grade Level: High School

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For additional lesson plans, visit sos.tn.gov/civics/lessonplans.



Introduction:

Students often feel confident in their knowledge of the national government, specifically with the three branches of government and the United States Constitution. However, when asked about state and local government, students generally have little to no understanding at all. This series of lesson plans is designed to introduce students to their local and state government, the state constitution that establishes the government's power, and ultimately how citizens play an important role in their state and local governments. This extended lesson plan can be divided into three days.

Guiding Questions:

Day 1 – Similarities and Differences Between Federal, State and Local Governments

- What are the three branches of power at the federal, state, and local government levels?
- What are the similarities and differences between the three branches at the different levels of government?

Day 2 – Get to Know YOUR Federal, State and Local Governments

- Who is the governor? Who are my state legislators?
- Who is the mayor? Who are my county commissioners or metro council members?
- When and how do they meet and serve the interests of the citizens?

Day 3 – State and Local Government and the Power of the Ordinary Citizen

- How can citizens monitor their local and state governments?
- What steps can citizens take to influence and get their voices heard?
- What issues are important to the community and how can citizens share those issues with their elected officials?

Learning Objectives: In the course of the lesson, students will...

Day 1:

- Explain the three branches of government at the federal, state, and local levels.
- Discuss the differences between a president, governor, and mayor.
- Discuss the differences between the U.S. Congress, the Tennessee General Assembly, and my local county legislative body.
- Discuss the differences between the U.S. Supreme Court, the Tennessee Supreme Court, and local courts.

Day 2:

- Name their local and state representation, including the Tennessee governor and the county or city mayor.
- Explain the role of their local and state elected officials including if and when they regularly meet.

Day 3:

- Describe how local citizens, including themselves, can follow what their government is doing, ask questions of elected leaders, and influence their decision making.
- Take an interest in a specific issue and engage their representatives regarding that issue.
- Have the opportunity to register to vote (if eligible) and vote in the next possible election.

Curriculum Standards:

GC.55 Provide examples of the principles of federalism, separation of powers, checks and balances, and popular sovereignty in the government of the state of Tennessee and the balance between the grand divisions within the state. (P, TN)

GC.60 Describe how citizens can monitor and influence local and state government as individuals and members of interest groups. (P, TN)

GC.62 Identify current representatives (per the student's respective district) in the Tennessee General Assembly and research their past and current proposed legislation that has significantly impacted the lives of Tennesseans. (P, TN)

GC.63 Identify the current governor of Tennessee and examine his/her platform for improving the quality of life in Tennessee. (P, TN)

GC.64 Working with other students, identify a significant public policy issue in your community, gather information about that issue, fairly evaluate the various points of view of competing interests, examine ways of participating in the decision making process about the issue, and write a position paper or make a presentation on how the issue should be resolved. (C, P, TN)

Materials Needed:

- *Tennessee Blue Books* (or [online version](#))
- Internet Access
 - [The White House – whitehouse.gov](#)
 - [U.S. Congress – congress.gov](#)
 - [U.S. Supreme Court – supremecourt.gov](#)
 - [Tennessee General Assembly – capitol.tn.gov](#)
 - [County Election Commissions](#)
- Worksheet (attached)
- District Maps
 - [Senate](#) (pg. 52)
 - [House](#) (pgs. 166-167)
- Paper
- Colored pencils, crayons, or highlighters
- Optional: Venn Diagram (attached)

Lesson Activities:

Day 1 – Similarities and Differences Between Federal, State and Local Governments.

Part I: Foundations of Federalism and American Democracy

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Depending on the academic level and experience of your students, consider exploring the three branches of government utilized in the United States: Executive, Legislative, and Judicial. Students who have had little to no exposure to state and local government should start at the federal level, while students with more experience may want to explore the topic from a more local approach. For local government information, students can look at the following links:

- [CTAS](#)
- [MTAS](#)
- [Administrative Office of the Courts](#)

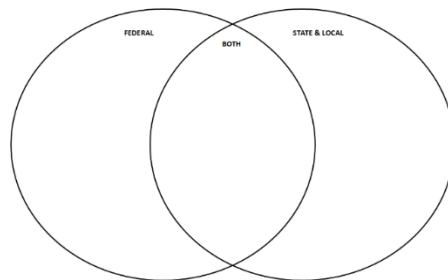
Teachers should consider discussion and exploration of what each branch of government represents and how each branch functions. Topics may include: checks and balances between the branches, specific language in the United States and/or Tennessee Constitutions, or real-world examples of the various branches in action.

To help facilitate discussion, teachers should consider assigning readings from the United States and/or Tennessee Constitutions prior to the start of class (or if block schedule allow time within the period) for students to become more familiar with specific examples within the legal documents.

Part II: Similarities and Differences

Example Activity: Venn-Diagram Exercise

On the board, draw three Venn diagrams and label one “Executive,” one “Legislative,” and one “Judicial.” For each left side circle label “Federal” and each right circle label “State & Local” with “Both” in the center section. Students should draw their own Venn Diagram on a separate sheet of paper or use the attached worksheets. Now have students write up examples of executive/legislative/judicial power and action at the different levels of government. This activity can be exploratory or review-oriented depending on student knowledge and skill set. See “Extension Option” at the end of the lesson to go further.



Teachers may also consider alternative activities including annotated illustrations, concept web, connect-to-today notes, or other useful engagement that allows the student to connect the similarities and differences between federal, state, and local governments.

Part III: How It Applies to Me

Having explored the three branches, their powers and purposes, and differentiated between the similarities and differences, teachers can use the last 10-15 minutes of class time to discuss the personal context of the information they just learned. Discussion questions may include:

- Which level of government do you feel has the most influence upon your life? Why?
- Which level of government do you see as the most powerful or least powerful? Why?
- Why do you think the founders of our state and nation believed this current model the best system for representative democracy? Why?
- (Question To Build On) How can the ordinary citizen engage with the different branches and different levels of government?

Homework:

Go home and ask an adult in your home if they can name the following elected officials.

- President and Vice-President
- Governor and Mayor
- U.S. Senators (2) and U.S. Congressman
- State Senator and State Representative
- County Commission or City Council Officials
- The nine (9) U.S. Supreme Court Justices.

Day 2 – Get to Know YOUR Federal, State and Local Governments

Part I: Who Represents Me?

Depending on the academic level and experience of your students, teachers should consider altering plans to best fit students' needs. Teachers should begin class by briefly reviewing the homework assignment and setting up the following activities as an opportunity to see if the adults at home got it right or wrong.

Federal Officials: Utilizing the worksheet (attached), students should be able to identify their federal officials. There are a variety of online resources to confirm the elected officials

at the federal level. Students may find the locations on their own, or teachers can specifically direct them to the the following websites:

- www.whitehouse.gov (Click on “The Administration”)
- www.congress.gov (Scroll to “Current Members of Congress”)
- www.supremecourt.gov (Click on “About the Court”)

State Officials (Using the Blue Book): Depending on the number of *Tennessee Blue Books*, divide the class into appropriate teams, pairs, or individually and have the students seek out who the leaders are that represent them in Tennessee government. Utilizing the worksheet (attached), students should be able to identify the name, party, and contact information for the following:

- [State Legislators \(House and Senate, pgs. 2-167\)](#)
- [State Executive \(Governor, pgs. 204-208\)](#)
- [State Judiciary \(State Supreme Court, pgs. 449-490\)](#)

Identifying individual legislators through the *Blue Book* can be challenging for students if it is their first time opening the resource. Enclosed in this lesson plan is a link to a PDF Tennessee District Maps ([Senate](#) & [House](#)) that can help locate the number of the elected official’s individual district. Students can also search for their specific legislators online at the Tennessee General Assembly’s website (www.capitol.tn.gov) to find their specific state legislators.

Once representatives at the state level have been identified, repeat the process again only this time at the **local** level. Depending on location and resources, this activity may require a bit of probing.

- [CTAS](#)
- [MTAS](#)
- [Tennessee Judicial Districts Map](#)

After having listed all the elected officials, have the students share any personal experience with these elected officials.

- Has anyone met their elected officials?
- Has anyone heard any news stories about these individuals?
- Can anyone describe what they do or what they have done for the community?

Part II: What Have My State and Local Officials Done? (10-15 minutes)

Using the Internet: After students have provided some possible previous knowledge, the next step is to utilize search resources to learn about these individuals at the state and local level. You may begin the search finding the individual representative on the Tennessee General Assembly website to see what bills the individual has sponsored. You may also broaden your search to find news stories or other content from an internet search engine.

- **What bills have they sponsored since the last election?**
(www.capitol.tn.gov)
 - i. Go to <http://www.capitol.tn.gov>
 - ii. Move your cursor over the word **LEGISLATORS** and click on either **HOUSE** or **SENATE MEMBERS**.
 - iii. Find your legislators name and click on it.
 - iv. Towards the right side of the member page click on the word **BILLS**
 - v. **BILLS SPONSORED** and **BILLS CO-SPONSORED** will provide a list of bills that individual legislator has either sponsored or co-sponsored during the current legislative session.
- **Has their name come up recently in the news in the last 12 months?**
(www.google.com)
 - i. Go to <http://www.google.com>
 - ii. In the search bar type in the full given name of the legislator you are wanting to search and hit **ENTER**.
 - iii. Click on the **NEWS** link at the top and scroll through the most recent stories to see if there are any specific to your legislator.

At the teacher's discretion, stop the research and discuss what information has been found. Brainstorm how this new information may or may not change students' point-of-views. What should citizens do with this information or how might this information encourage or discourage participation?

Homework: Teachers should ask students to go home and share with the adults they spoke with on the previous assignment their new knowledge. Students should then ask the adults what issues or concerns they have that they believe state or local officials can have an impact in resolving and bring those answers to class tomorrow.

Day 3 – State and Local Government and the Power of the Ordinary Citizen.

Part I: A Discussion on the Issues

Depending on the academic level and experience of your students, teachers should consider altering plans to best fit students' needs. Teachers should begin class by briefly reviewing the homework assignment and setting up the following activities as an opportunity to connect the ideas from home with the content knowledge of class.

Discussion on the Issues: Students should share some of the answers they received at home about the issues most important to the adults they spoke with and how might local and state officials work to resolve these issues. Allow the students to debate and discuss the topics, recognizing some issues may require teacher intervention when necessary.

Part II: A Discussion on Civic Engagement

After a few specific issues have been discussed and agreed upon, direct the discussion towards how issues can be shared with elected officials and brainstorm ways students can engage with their elected officials. Utilize pairs or small groups to begin brainstorming, then come back together to share what ideas were discussed.

Some ideas, though not all, that teachers can offer if not already provided by the students include:

- **Direct Connections**
 - **Phone/Email/Visit:** Personal connections with local leaders allow constituents to have direct contact and influence with their elected officials. These can range from a simple phone call or e-mail, to visiting the elected official in his or her office in the district or at the State Capitol.
- **Participation and Involvement**
 - **Volunteer**
 - **Phone Banking** – Making phone calls on behalf of the candidate.
 - **Door Knocking** – Talking to neighbors and others directly in the community with a face-to-face conversation.
 - **Attend Events** – Showing up for important events and rallies across the district.
 - **Voting**
 - **The easiest and most important way to directly impact issues.**
 - If some of your students will be 18 years old by the next election, encourage them to register to vote so they can exercise this important right. For more information, visit sos.tn.gov/elections.

- **Candidacy**
 - **YOU can run for office.**

Teachers can use these conversations to tie back into the larger concept of voting and the importance of voting participation.

Homework (Formative Assessment): What Do YOU Think Works Best?

Have students write a paragraph for each of the following questions:

1. Which level and branch of government do **YOU** think has the most impact on your life today?
2. Who are your specific **elected** officials at the state and local level and give one interesting fact you learned about each.
3. How do you plan to become more involved in fulfilling your civic duty as an American citizen and Tennessee resident? Be sure to include at least one step that you intend to complete before the end of the school year.

*** Teachers should feel free to go outside the scope of this lesson and modify the steps to include or focus on local elected officials if direct involvement is more accessible for student participation at the local level. ***

Extension Options:

GC.54 Identify and describe the provisions of the Tennessee Constitution that define and distribute powers and authority of the state government. (P, TN)

Introduction to the Tennessee Constitution, State and Local Government.

First 15: Pairs/Small Groups Find Similarities and Differences (Venn Diagram)

Divide your room into pairs or small groups for this activity. If students were asked to read the Tennessee Constitution and U.S. Constitution in advance, then provide students the freedom to use the entire 15 minutes to list as many of the differences and similarities as they could find. If students have not already read either document, then in the interest of time consider dividing the documents into sections and giving specific sections to each group or pairing.

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On the board, draw a Venn Diagram with the left circle label “U.S. Constitution” and the right circle labeled “TN Constitution.” Students should draw their own Venn Diagram on a separate sheet of paper. For space saving, students can either write the section number or a brief title of the main idea for each point in the appropriate space.

Second 15: Group Share to Create One Complete Venn Diagram

Each group will provide at least one similarity and/or difference between the two documents. Once everyone has shared, finish the diagram with any missing comparisons.

Final 15: Key points in the TN Constitution

Note taking session to elaborate on the principles of federalism, separation of powers, checks and balances, and popular sovereignty in the government of the state of Tennessee and the balance between the grand divisions within the state. Cite specific locations for this materials and draw connections, when possible, to the U.S. Constitution.

MY FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVES

FEDERAL - LEGISLATIVE (CONGRESS)

U.S. Senator: _____ **PARTY:** _____

Contact Address: _____

Contact Phone Number: (_____) _____ - _____

Year of Last Election: _____ Election Results (% of Victory): _____

Sponsored Legislation

U.S. Senator: _____ **PARTY:** _____

Contact Address: _____

Contact Phone Number: (_____) _____ - _____

Year of Last Election: _____ Election Results (% of Victory): _____

Sponsored Legislation

U.S. Congressman: _____ **DISTRICT #:** ____ **PARTY:** _____

Contact Address: _____

Contact Phone Number: (_____) _____ - _____

Year of Last Election: _____ **Election Results (% of Victory):** _____

Sponsored Legislation

FEDERAL – EXECUTIVE (PRESIDENT)

President: _____ **PARTY:** _____

Contact Address: _____

Contact Phone Number: (_____) _____ - _____

Year of Last Election: _____ **Election Results (% of Victory):** _____

Supported Legislation

FEDERAL – (JUDICIAL) SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

Chief Justice: _____

Justice: _____

Justice: _____

Justice: _____

Justice: _____

Justice: _____

Justice: _____

Justice: _____

Justice: _____

MY STATE REPRESENTATIVES

STATE (LEGISLATIVE)

State Senator: _____ **DISTRICT #:** ____ **PARTY:** _____

Contact Address: _____

Contact Phone Number: (_____) _____ - _____

Year of Last Election: _____ **Election Results (% of Victory):** _____

Sponsored Legislation

State Representative: _____ **DISTRICT #:** ____ **PARTY:** _____

Contact Address: _____

Contact Phone Number: (_____) _____ - _____

Year of Last Election: _____ **Election Results (% of Victory):** _____

Sponsored Legislation

STATE (EXECUTIVE)

Governor: _____ **PARTY:** _____

Contact Address: _____

Contact Phone Number: (_____) _____ - _____

Year of Last Election: _____ Election Results (% of Victory): _____

Supported Legislation

STATE (JUDICIAL)

Chief Justice: _____

Justice: _____

Justice: _____

Justice: _____

Justice: _____

MY LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES

LOCAL (EXECUTIVE)

City/County Mayor: _____

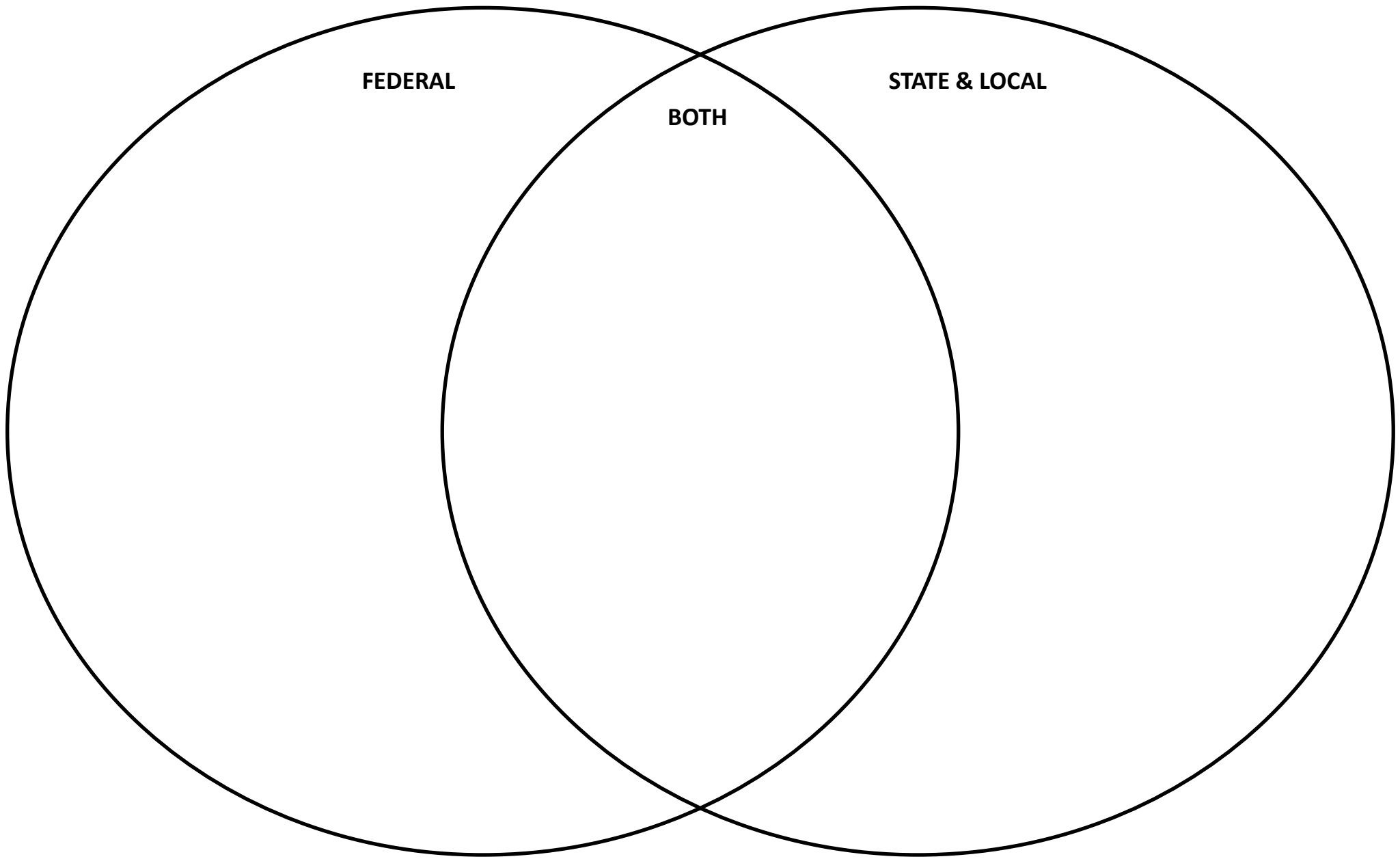
LOCAL (LEGISLATIVE)

City Council/County Commission Member: _____

LOCAL (JUDICIAL)

District #: _____

Judges:



FEDERAL

STATE & LOCAL

BOTH